

Honoring All Who Served

THIS MONTH WE REMEMBER WITH GRATITUDE THE VETERANS WHO ANSWERED OUR NATION'S CALL TO DUTY IN THE QUEST FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM AT HOME AND AROUND THE WORLD. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

SENATOR GARCIA SUPPORTS NEW DIVESTITURE LAW TO HELP FIGHT TERROR

The state of Michigan is taking action to help our servicemen and women combat terror. Under Senate-led legislation now enacted into law, certain Michigan governmental entities are prohibited from investing their money in public companies actively doing business with terrorist countries, including Iran, Sudan, Syria, North Korea and Cuba. These entities are also required to divest any current investments that they have in such companies. I sponsored Senate Bill 852 as part of the package.

The new laws also require the Michigan Department of Treasury to post the names of companies conducting business with terrorist countries on a public website.

At least 16 other states have enacted similar divestment measures and 31 other states are considering such legislation. Michigan is at the forefront with the nation's most comprehensive divestiture laws.

Michigan invests at least \$60 billion from various state funds, such as state retirement systems and the Veterans Trust Fund. It is simply unacceptable to invest these public dollars in companies that do business with state sponsors of terror.



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FUNDING FOR VETERANS SERVICES BOOSTED

More than a dozen Veterans Service Organizations will see a three percent funding increase this year, thanks to passage of the 2009 Fiscal Year Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs budget.

This new \$183 million budget increased funding and adopted the Senate recommendation to offer incentives to all counties to fund at least one full-time veterans counselor. While many vets look to the private, non-profit service organizations for help in obtaining federal veterans benefits, they contact their county for assistance regarding benefits and services available at the local level.

Along with funding Michigan's two veterans' homes, the budget includes \$53 million in capital outlay projects, including armory repairs and a major urban terrain project at Camp Grayling.

You can view the entire budget bill, Public Act 214 of 2008, at www.legislature.mi.gov.

GARCIA SUPPORTS AID FOR VETS' ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A sizable number of our veterans are self-employed. I supported legislation to assist Michigan's military veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan in pursuing business opportunities.

Senate Bills 732-734 would establish a "Michigan Patriot Business" designation for companies with at least a 50 percent ownership by an active service member or veteran of the Iraq or Afghanistan wars. Companies could also get business development assistance and help in securing government contracts under the legislation. The bills await action in the House.

Veterans interested in starting or expanding a business can also find information as well as links to federal contracting opportunities at a federal website, www.vetbiz.gov.



HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

NEW LAW RECORDS NATIONAL GUARD DISCHARGE

A new law will help veterans keep track of important information they may need in the future for employment or to receive benefits.

Public Act 163 of 2008 (Senate Bill 752) requires the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to file the DD Form 214 with the register of deeds in the home county of the National Guard member. This “discharge from active duty” form is a complete record that includes campaign awards, decorations, medals, citations, promotions, re-enlistment eligibility and other information. It is commonly used to obtain veterans benefits. The form will be accessible only to the veteran; it is not a public document.

Years after discharge, some veterans may not know the location of their form. Having an additional source of access to their DD Form 214 ensures that this information is always available.

RESOURCES

- More than 1,800 Michigan National Guard soldiers are currently deployed. Keep track of units and their locations at www.michigan.gov/dmva.
- The Military Family Relief Fund helps the families of Michigan’s citizen-soldiers in times of need. To apply for assistance or to donate to the Fund, visit www.michigan.gov/dmva.
- Access the one-stop shop for information on veterans benefits and assistance at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at www.va.gov, or call toll-free 1-800-827-1000.
- Check historical documents of interest to veterans and find links to other military research sites at www.archives.gov/veterans/research/.
- Stay up-to-date on homeland security issues at www.michigan.gov/homeland.

GARCIA SPONSORS LEGISLATION

Some of the legislation I introduced this session includes:

- Senate Bill 606 allows an individual who is “mobilized for military duty” to be temporarily exempt from license renewal fees, continuing education requirements, and other related requirements within the Occupational Code of Michigan.

Under current law, only an individual who is “in an area designated as a combat zone” is exempt from these requirements. Not everyone actively serving in the military is in a designated combat zone. The legislation would alleviate an unnecessary burden on military personnel serving overseas in a non-combat zone.

- Senate Bill 747 (Public Act 141 of 2008) allows a student to receive an excused absence if he or she is absent for up to one full day of school because his or her parent or legal guardian is being deployed to or returning from active duty.

I offered this legislation after it was brought to my attention that some public schools refused to grant excused absences to students in these special circumstances.

- Senate Bill 1201 allows active duty military personnel to opt out of their cellular telephone contract without penalty.

Currently, someone deployed on active duty does not always have the option to terminate their contract without incurring a large penalty or paying for a cell phone they are unable to use while deployed.

- Senate Bill 1211 allows the Secretary of State to waive the driving skills test for military personnel who wish to acquire the vehicle group designation for indorsement.

The legislation reduces the burden of a road test for veterans who are already trained on this equipment and recognizes their military training for their civilian job.

- Senate Joint Resolution G requires public universities to consider an active duty military member, spouse and dependent children as Michigan residents for tuition rate consideration.

I am pleased this goal was accomplished without legislation due to the efforts of the DoD, the Legislature and Michigan’s community colleges and public universities.

I am also working on the following:

- Legislation to allow immediate family members of activated soldiers who are about to be deployed to take up to 10 days of unpaid leave, without penalty to their employment.
- Legislation to extend the amount of time allowed for military personnel to renew their driver’s license.
- Legislation to allow military personnel and recently discharged personnel who were firefighters in the military, an exemption from the tests required for civilian firefighters. This would also apply to HAZMAT training and testing.
- Legislation to require the state of Michigan to pay Reservists, National Guard and active military who received the Purple Heart and are “medically separated” \$100 a month for life.



DC3: BRINGING DEFENSE AND HOMELAND SECURITY DOLLARS TO MICHIGAN

During World War II, Michigan was known as the Arsenal of Democracy. I sponsored legislation now enacted into law that created the Defense Contract Coordination Center (DC3) to capitalize on our state’s manufacturing and high-tech expertise and help restore Michigan as a leader in the defense industry.

The center is aggressively working to maximize homeland security and defense business opportunities for Michigan companies, leading to new jobs and investments. In 2007, the DC3 secured more than \$315 million in contracts, with a goal to double that amount in 2008. Recently awarded contracts range from supplying combat boots to armored vehicles.

I am proud of the vital role Michigan businesses have in supporting and supplying our troops and anticipate our state will have an increasingly visible presence in the multi-billion-dollar defense industry.